

# **Formation of the Oronogo-Duenweg Mining Belt TAG: The TAG Group's Perspective**

Representatives of the EPA Region VII began a series of meetings with officers of Jasper County, Missouri, environmental groups and elected officials in the spring of 1992. As a result of those meetings, two Jasper County environmental groups were invited by the EPA to form a single group to apply for a Technical Advisor Grant (TAG) in connection with the Oronogo-Duenweg Mining Belt (Jasper County) Superfund Site where the EPA is attempting to reduce environmental exposure to lead, cadmium and zinc in ground water and soil in eleven tracts covering about 240 square miles.

By August 14, 1992, the two organizations, Citizens to Save Our Environment and Citizens for Environmental Safety, officially requested TAG application forms and relevant materials. The two organizations together formed a separate group for purposes of the TAG -- the Jasper County Superfund Site Coalition, a non-profit corporation.

Preparation of the application took longer than anticipated and an extension was requested of and granted by the EPA. The draft application was submitted to the EPA in late January, 1993. After several changes were made, the application was approved on April 27, 1994. The lengthy application process seemed to be caused by two factors - (1) the Coalition relied primarily on volunteers and it usually took twice as long as expected to complete each needed change, and (2) the EPA Region VII had never done a TAG application before and the agency's community relations people, who were always very available, often had to rely on guidance from other EPA folks who were not.

By the end of the third year of the TAG, the Jasper County Superfund Site was still projected to be active for many years. The Jasper Country Superfund Site Coalition applied for a second grant on February 17, 1997. A letter dated March 25, 1997, advised us that the additional funding requested was available to the Coalition. A formal letter from the Regional Administrator notifying the Coalition that the grant request had been received on June 27, 1997. Clearly the expertise gained by both the Coalition and the EPA in the intervening years considerably reduced the application time.

The Coalition has taken several actions to fulfill its mission of evaluating, publicizing, and commenting upon documents generated by the Jasper County Superfund Site.

We initially hired a team of technical advisors. After clearing the process with the EPA, the Coalition developed a bid package for potential TA's. Advertisements were placed in the Kansas City Star, the Springfield News-Leader, the Joplin Globe and the Tulsa World. In addition, letters were sent to all appropriate companies listed in the Joplin and Springfield, Missouri, telephone books. A pre-bid information meeting was held at the Webb City, Missouri, Public Library during which maps and documents were made available to potential bidders.

After review of the submitted bids, the executive director and the grant administrator of the Coalition traveled to Kansas City and Manhattan, Kansas, to interview the finalists. The on-site interviews made clear that the Coalition would be best served by the Kansas State University team headed up by Dr. Fred Oehme.

We have used the TA team in two basic ways - to review, interpret and provide the Board of Directors with comments on documents generated by the Superfund Site process , and to meet with the public and Coalition's Board of Advisors as needed to discuss and explain technical issues (coincidentally, our TAs have proven particularly valuable in that they have contact and opportunity for input with both EPA staff and with resource persons the EPA relies on). Our liaison with the TA's is our grant administrator.

The Coalition had originally planned to publicize Superfund information through a series of newsletters. However, early in the process the Board of Directors decided instead to form an Advisory Board from the affected communities. Members were requested from the public at large as well as hand-picked to ensure adequate input. Members included such affected populations as parents of at-risk children and members of the medical, financial, realty, and legal communities. In addition, two members were involved in hauling gravel from the Superfund Site, several were environmentalists, one serves as the city inspector from one of the most seriously affected towns, another was a county commissioner, and another a mayor.

Initial participation was very strong. However, after the Record of Decision was filed on the subject of greatest concern to most Advisory Board members - the remediation of contaminated residential yards - their involvement has diminished somewhat. The Advisory Board serves the purposes of informing concerned citizens about the Superfund Site and informing various governmental agencies of the citizens' concerns. Excellent coverage by the Joplin Globe also ensured that information was available to the general public.

The Coalition has been fortunate in that its grant administrator is passionately concerned about the environment, donates twice as much time to the Coalition as he bills for, is well-versed in the issues surrounding the Superfund Site and communicates effectively with our TAs.

Over the years, the Coalition has provided numerous technical and public opinion comments to the EPA concerning the investigations, plans and activities at the Superfund Site. We've found that our activity level changes depending on the status of the various site studies and remediation project.